50 Business Idioms & Phrases Everyone Should Know

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CUT CORNERS

Meaning: To do something the easiest or quickest way

How to use it: "Cutting corners on case studies will result in careless errors."
IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE

MEANING: SOMETHING IS NOT COMPLICATED TO UNDERSTAND

HOW TO USE IT: "JUST LOOK UP THE ANSWER ONLINE; IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE."
GET THE BALL ROLLING

MEANING: TO GET STARTED

HOW TO USE IT: “IT’S TIME TO GET THE BALL ROLLING ON THE 2018 FORECAST.”
MEANING: TO BE FAMILIAR WITH CURRENT INFORMATION

HOW TO USE IT: “WE HAVE A NEW TEAM MEMBER STARTING THIS WEEK. CAN EVERYONE HELP HIM GET UP TO SPEED ON OUR ACCOUNTS?”
ON THE BACK BURNER

MEANING: LOW PRIORITY

HOW TO USE IT: “PUT THAT REPORT ON THE BACK BURNER AND FOCUS ON NEW BUSINESS.”
MEANING: TO START AGAIN AFTER A PLAN OR IDEA WAS NOT SUCCESSFUL

HOW TO USE IT: “THE CLIENT REJECTED OUR ORIGINAL CONCEPT, SO IT’S BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD.”
FOR THE LONG HAUL

MEANING: A LONG PERIOD OF TIME

HOW TO USE IT: "THE NEW BUSINESS PITCH WILL BE HARD WORK, BUT WE'RE IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL."
BURN THE MIDNIGHT OIL

Meaning: To consistently work beyond normal business hours.

How to use it: "Our manager is burning the midnight oil to meet every deadline."
CHANGE OF PACE

MEANING: TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM A NORMAL ROUTINE

HOW TO USE IT: “COMPANY OUTINGS ARE A NICE CHANGE OF PACE FROM OUR REGULAR WORK WEEK.”
THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Meaning: To go beyond a normal idea.

How to use it: “Stop looking at past examples and think outside the box.”
ON THE SAME PAGE

MEANING: TO HAVE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING WITH OTHERS

HOW TO USE IT: “LET’S ALL COMMUNICATE CONSTANTLY SO WE ARE ON THE SAME PAGE.”
OUT ON A LIMP

MEANING: TO DO OR SAY SOMETHING RISKY

HOW TO USE IT: “SHE WENT OUT ON A LIMP TO DEFEND MY UNCONVENTIONAL STRATEGY.”
JUMP THE GUN

Meaning: To do something early or before the right time.

How to use it: “Next time, do more research instead of jumping the gun.”
THROW IN THE TOWEL

MEANING: TO QUIT OR ACCEPT FAILURE

HOW TO USE IT: “AFTER RECEIVING NEGATIVE FEEDBACK, SHE WAS READY TO THROW IN THE TOWEL.”
MISS THE MARK

MEANING: TO FAIL TO ACHIEVE AN INTENDED GOAL

HOW TO USE IT: “PLEASE REDO THE PRESENTATION SINCE YOU MISSED THE MARK THE FIRST TIME.”
STAY ON YOUR TOES

MEANING: TO STAY ALERT

HOW TO USE IT: “THERE WILL BE RANDOM TESTING ON THIS, SO STAY ON YOUR TOES.”
RAISE THE BAR

MEANING: TO RAISE STANDARDS OR EXPECTATIONS

HOW TO USE IT: “THE TEAM MUST RAISE THE BAR IF WE WANT TO WIN A CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD.”
BACK TO SQUARE ONE

ONE MEANING: BACK TO THE BEGINNING

HOW TO USE IT: "IF WE LOSE OUR FUNDING FOR MORE RESEARCH, IT’LL BE BACK TO SQUARE ONE."
HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD

MEANING: TO FIND EXACTLY THE RIGHT ANSWER

HOW TO USE IT: “THAT’S WHAT I WAS THINKING — YOU HIT THE NAIL ON THE HEAD.”
CUT TO THE CHASE

**Meaning:** To get to the point without wasting time

**How to use it:** "Stop talking about irrelevant statistics and cut to the chase."
ROCK THE BOAT

MEANING: TO DISTURB A SITUATION

HOW TO USE IT: "THE TEAM IS FINALLY WORKING WELL TOGETHER. A NEW HIRE MAY ROCK THE BOAT."
Meaning: To be in trouble

How to use it: “My coworker is in hot water after sending a rude email.”
GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR

MEANING: TO ENTER AN ORGANIZATION OR INDUSTRY

HOW TO USE IT: "A COFFEE MEETING CAN HELP YOU GET YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR WITH PROSPECTIVE CLIENTS."
SMALL TALK

MEANING: A DISCUSSION ABOUT EVERYDAY TOPICS

HOW TO USE IT: "THE EMPLOYEES MADE SMALL TALK ABOUT THEIR WEEKENDS WHILE WAITING OUTSIDE THE BOARD ROOM."
HAVE YOUR WORK CUT OUT

MEANING: TO HAVE SOMETHING VERY DIFFICULT TO DO

HOW TO USE IT: “SHE HAS HER WORK CUT OUT FOR HER WHEN IT COMES TO TRAINING THE NEW TEAM.”
SEE EYE TO EYE

MEANING: TO AGREE

HOW TO USE IT: “MY BOSS AND I DON’T ALWAYS SEE EYE TO EYE ON REPORTING TECHNIQUES.”
TO BE IN THE DARK

MEANING: TO BE UNINFORMED

HOW TO USE IT: “THE COMPANY MERGER IS CONFIDENTIAL, SO WE’RE GOING TO KEEP SOME EMPLOYEES IN THE DARK.”
THE BOTTOM LINE

MEANING: THE MOST IMPORTANT PART

HOW TO USE IT: “IT MAY BE A GOOD IDEA, BUT THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT IT’S NOT PROFITABLE.”
CALL THE SHOTS

MEANING: TO MAKE THE MAJOR DECISIONS

HOW TO USE IT: “ULTIMATELY, IT’S THE CLIENT’S CHOICE SINCE THEY CALL THE SHOTS.”
SLACK OFF

MEANING: TO WORK LAZILY

HOW TO USE IT: "DON’T EXPECT A PROMOTION IF YOU’RE CONSTANTLY SLACKING OFF."
GLASS CEILING

Meaning: A metaphorical barrier preventing advancement to a higher position.

How to use it: “I think there's a glass ceiling because I don't see any room for growth here.”
FINE PRINT

MEANING: DETAILS OF A CONTRACT THAT ARE USUALLY OVERLOOKED

HOW TO USE IT: “ALWAYS READ THE FINE PRINT BEFORE SIGNING A CONTRACT.”
CRUNCH THE NUMBERS

MEANING: TO DO A LOT OF CALCULATIONS OR TO SOLVE A PROBLEM

HOW TO USE IT: “WE’LL NEED TO CRUNCH THE NUMBERS TO MAKE SURE WE CAN AFFORD THIS.”
HAVE A LOT ON YOUR PLATE

MEANING: TO HAVE A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

HOW TO USE IT: “I HAVE A LOT ON MY PLATE SINCE MY SUPERVISOR QUIT LAST WEEK.”
LEARNING CURVE

MEANING: THE RATE OF GAINING EXPERIENCE OR NEW SKILLS

HOW TO USE IT: “NEW EMPLOYEES USUALLY HAVE A LEARNING CURVE.”
RAMP UP

MEANING: TO INCREASE

HOW TO USE IT: “THE TEAM NEEDS TO RAMP UP PRODUCTIVITY IN ORDER TO MEET THEIR DEADLINES.”
IN THE RED

MEANING: TO BE IN DEBT

HOW TO USE IT: “IF MY COMPANY LOSES THIS CLIENT, WE’LL BE IN THE RED FOR MONTHS.”
THE BALL'S IN YOUR COURT

MEANING: TO HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY OR TO TAKE ACTION

HOW TO USE IT: "WE HANDED OFF THE ASSETS SO THE BALL'S IN YOUR COURT NOW."
OFF THE TOP OF ONE’S HEAD

MEANING: TO KNOW IMMEDIATELY

HOW TO USE IT: “I CAN’T THINK OF ANY IDEAS OFF THE TOP OF MY HEAD; I’LL HAVE TO DO MORE RESEARCH.”
LONG SHOT

MEANING: A LOW LIKELIHOOD OF SOMETHING HAPPENING

HOW TO USE IT: “IT’S A LONG SHOT, BUT MAYBE WE CAN CONVINCE OUR BOSS TO TAKE FRIDAYS OFF.”
24/7

Meaning: 24 hours a day, seven days a week

How to use it: "He's in the office 24/7 due to his heavy workload."
MEANING: TO DO SOMETHING BY LAW OR RULE

HOW TO USE IT: “THE COMPANY FIRED THE CEO FOR NOT DOING THINGS BY THE BOOK.”
BALLELPARK FIGURE

MEANING: A ROUGH ESTIMATE

HOW TO USE IT: “IF YOU DON’T KNOW THE EXACT COST, JUST GIVE A BALLPARK FIGURE.”
BLUE-SKY THINKING

MEANING: IDEAS THAT ARE FEASIBLE IN A PERFECT WORLD

HOW TO USE IT: “THE MANAGER’S BLUE-SKY THINKING ALWAYS RESULTED IN UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.”
PUNCH A PUPPY

Meaning: To do something unpleasant

How to use it: “The boss was really punching a puppy when he laid off 15 people.”
THOUGHT SHOWER
MEANING: TO COME UP WITH A BUNCH OF IDEAS
HOW TO USE IT: “WE NEED A THOUGHT SHOWER TO COME UP WITH NEW IDEAS.”
CLOSE OF PLAY

MEANING: THE END OF A WORKING DAY

HOW TO USE IT: “YOU NEED TO FINISH THE AUDIT BY CLOSE OF PLAY.”
Peel the Onion

Meaning: To look at something one layer at a time

How to use it: “Let’s peel the onion to figure out where we messed up.”
MEANING: A GENERAL IDEA OF WHAT'S HAPPENING

HOW TO USE IT: "I ONLY HAVE A COUPLE MINUTES TO CHAT; JUST GIVE ME A HELICOPTER VIEW OF THE REPORT."
FORTNIGHT

MEANING: A PERIOD OF TWO WEEKS

HOW TO USE IT: “SHE WORKED DAY AND NIGHT FOR A FORTNIGHT TO FINISH THE PROPOSAL.”
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